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THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE DUTCH WORD
KABELJAUW.

THE etymology of the word *kabeljauw* has been the cause of much trouble to Dutch scholars. It is a commerce-word meaning 'cod-fish,' and is of wide distribution in more or less modified forms among European nations. The Old Dutch is *kabelaw* and *kaplawe*, and the word is found as early as 1350.¹ The Middle Dutch is *kabelow*, *kabbelow*, *kaplawe* and *kabbelaw*. In German we find *kabeljau* and *kabliau*; in Swedish *kabeljo*, *kabbiljo* and *cabiljo*, and in Danish and Norwegian, *kabeljau* or *kabliau*. The East Frisian is *kabbeljouw*. English *cabilliau* and *kabbelow* (sailor's slang for salted fish) are other forms of the word occurring in the Teutonic languages.²

As the word stands in the present form, it is impossible to give any satisfactory etymology for it. It has been suggested that it is derived from the French *chabliau*, Old Fr. *chable*, Low Breton *cabl*, Mid. Latin *capulum*, *caplum*, and that it is thus connected with Latin *capere* (that which is taken?). But this derivation is, at best, very unsatisfactory. Various other explanations have been offered; but they are all open to more or less serious objection.

In the Romance languages the word meaning 'cod-fish,' is in French *cabillaud* (Old Fr. *cabillau*, *cabellau*, *cabeliau*, *kabeliau*, *kableau*), but in Portuguese *bacalhão* and *bacalhau*, in Spanish *bacalao*, in Italian *bachalao*, and in Catalan *bacallá* or *bacallar*, and Provençal *bacaiiau*.³ Now all these forms except the French

¹ At this time arose the celebrated war of the 'Hoeks' and the 'Kabelaws,' or the nobles and the burghers.

² Low Latin (beginning of the 12th century) is *cabellauvus*. We need pay no attention here to the occurrence of the word in the Slavonic dialects. It appears, however, evidently as a loan-word in Polish as *kablon* and *kablion*.

³ The form *cabeliau* found in Roumanian is probably borrowed directly from the French.

are given by lexicographers of the Romance languages as derived from the Basque language in which the word *bacalaiba* means a cod-fish. The Basques are known to have been the first Europeans to engage in the cod-fishery at the Banks of Newfoundland and on the coasts of America, and it is most probable that they introduced the word directly to their immediate neighbors. This derivation of the Romance form of the word from the Basque is not original here for it has been suggested as a possibility before.

The form which the word assumes in all the Teutonic languages, shows the frequent linguistic change of metathesis of *k(c)* and *b*. Now my theory is, that in the Romance languages, as we have seen, the word has been borrowed directly from the Basque, but that all the forms in the Teutonic dialects are disseminated from the Middle Dutch. This would explain the fact that the Germanic forms are uniformly those in *kab*, while the Romance forms are as uniformly *bac(k)*. That this is the true explanation of the origin of the Teutonic forms is proven by the fact that we find, side by side, in Middle Dutch (Old Low German), both *bakeljauw* and *kabbeljou*, thus giving the transitional stage between the Romance and Germanic forms.

Under this hypothesis the French *cabillaud* is irregular. This I explain by assuming that the French did not take the word directly from the Basques, but that they got it from the Dutch merchants with whom for centuries their business relations were much closer and more varied than they were with any of the nations to the south of them. If it was in this way that the word entered the French language, the apparent irregularity of its form, according to my theory, would disappear. Darmesteter in his *Dictionnaire général de la langue française* s. v. *cabillaud* says, 'mot emprunté du hollandais,' which seems to confirm my idea. The *d* on the end of *cabillaud* which appears nowhere else in any other form of the word has been added by the old French purists on the supposition that the *au* of *cabillaud* was connected with the French suffix *-aud*, Germanic *-wald*. This is, of course, not so; for the analogy is false.

Whether the Basque word is the original derivation of the

Dutch *kabeljauw* or whether that is in itself a borrowed word is a question which has never been raised. My own belief which I cannot at present substantiate is that it is a loan-word even in Basque. It is certainly possible that as the Basque fishermen brought back a new fish from the coasts of North America, they brought back also the name which was current among the aborigines of Newfoundland, Labrador, New England, or wherever they may have landed during their adventurous voyages. If this is so the word has taken a long journey and returned to its native shores, for the early Portuguese voyagers gave the name of *Isla de Bacalhãos* to a small island off the coast of Newfoundland on account of the number of cod found there. Such an idea is, naturally, mere conjecture. We can prove nothing, but we can, at least, in the words of the ancient Dutch proverb:

‘Een spiering uitgooien om een kabeljauw te vangen.’

MONTGOMERY SCHUYLER, JR.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK.